Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA DNRC

Draft
Environmental Assessment

ECHO LAKE
LEASE AGREEMENT AND
FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT

November 20, 2003

Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

ECHO LAKE
LEASE AGREEMENT AND
FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

A. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) proposes to issue a lease agreement (land use authorization) to Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to construct and operate a fishing access site (FAS) on school trust lands at Echo Lake. The lease requires FWP to pay an annual land rental fee to compensate the Trust. The proposed action includes a process whereby FWP could eventually receive fee title to the property or an easement that would eliminate paying annual lease fees. This would first require a subdivision review process of the entire 28-acre School Trust Land parcel and dedication of the FAS acreage as open space or parkland.

B. Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to accept the lease agreement and future land dedication to improve and manage public access to Echo Lake. Proposed improvements on this tract would include: improve the county access road to the site; construct a gravel interior loop road and parking for 12 vehicles with trailers and 10 additional standard vehicle parking spaces; construct hard-surface boat ramp; install accessible parking, road barriers, and latrine; construct host pad with utilities; and fence the property boundary.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

A lease agreement will be signed by the DNRC and FWP that outlines the land use fees, length of agreement, capital development responsibilities, maintenance responsibilities, and other management issues for each agency.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks Authorization

The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, which directs FWP to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The opportunity for public involvement regarding the proposed project is provided under MCA 23-1-110. Section 23-2-101 MCA allows FWP to plan and develop outdoor recreational resources in the state and receive and expend funds, including federal funds.

The Boat Fee in Lieu of Tax revenue includes 20% of all fees in lieu of tax collected by the county treasurer and is used by FWP to improve regional boating facilities under the control of FWP (Section 23-2-518, MCA).

The Dingell-Johnson bill was passed in the U.S. Legislature August 9, 1950, and was amended to the Wallop-Breaux bill in 1984. A percentage of funds spent on fishing equipment and motorboat-associated fuel are apportioned back to the states based on the land and water area and the number of fishing licenses sold. This bill requires that 15% of these funds are spent on motorboat access projects. Twenty-five percent of the total project cost must be from nonfederal funds. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service administers Wallop-Breaux funds, which will be requested for use in this project.

FWP is authorized by Section 87-1-209 to acquire lands by purchase, gift, or other agreement, or acquire easements upon lands or waters for certain purposes, including public fishing and outdoor recreation, contingent upon consent of the FWP Commission.

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Authorization
DNRC is authorized under 77-1-301 and 77-1-601 to seek and identify land use opportunities on school trust lands in order to derive revenue to the school trusts of Montana. In addition, a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the Real Estate Management Bureau is currently being prepared to help guide decisions affecting the use of school trust lands for uses other than agriculture, grazing, and timber. After completion of the PEIS (expected in November 2004), DNRC would seek approval of a minor subdivision on the property that includes the proposed FAS and, by so doing, provide a mechanism to dedicate "parkland" for purposes of accommodating a permanent FAS.

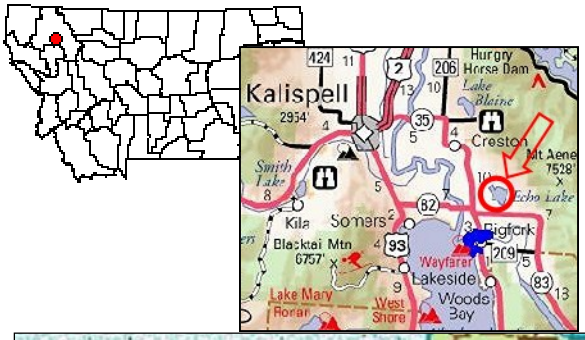
3. **Name of project:** Echo Lake Lease Agreement and Fishing Access Site Development

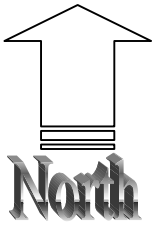
4. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):** Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation office are joint project sponsors.

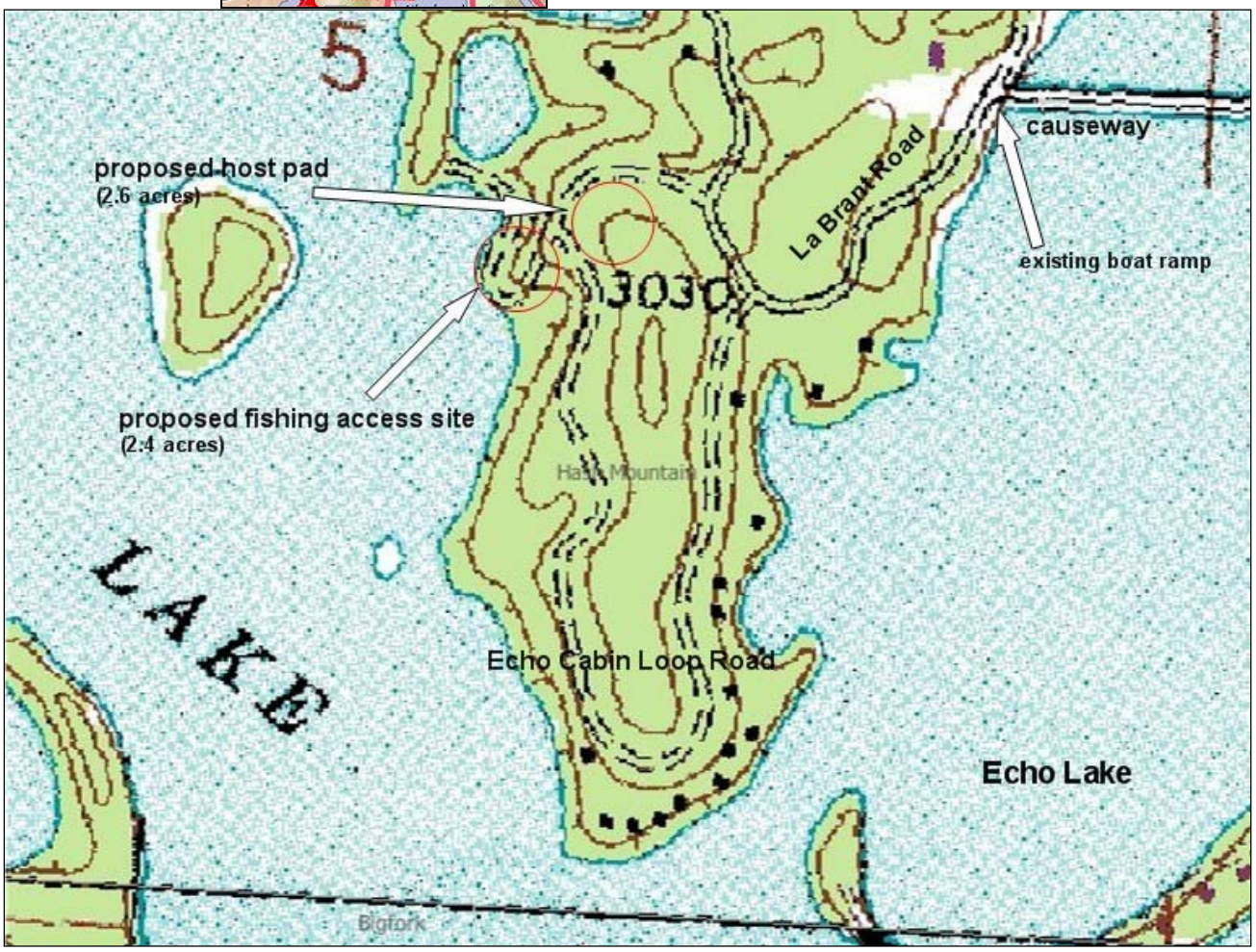
FWP	DNRC
1420 East 6th Avenue	1625 11th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0701	Helena, MT 59620
406-444-7885	406-444-2074

5. **If applicable:**
A lease agreement between DNRC and FWP should be completed early in 2004.
Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Spring 2004
Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2004/Spring 2005
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 50%

6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range, and township):
Echo Lake is located about 6 air-miles northeast of Bigfork. It can be reached by traveling about 14 miles east and south of Kalispell on Highway 35 to LaBrant Road; travel about 5 miles east and south to the north entrance of Echo Cabin Loop Road, then approximately 0.4 mile, with the site divided by Echo Cabin Loop Road. The site can also be reached from Highway 83 by traveling north on Echo Lake Road approximately 3.5 miles to the northern Echo Cabin Loop Road entrance. The site is located on Echo Lake, Flathead County, Montana; Township 27 North, Range 19 West, Section 5, NW4SE4.







Base map USGS Hash Mountain Quadrangle

7. Project size - estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	5	Dry cropland	0
		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	0.10	Rangeland	0
		Other	0

8. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

(a) Permits: Permits not yet received will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

Agency Name	Permit
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	404 Fill Permit in Waters of the U.S.
Permit received, valid September 8, 2003-July 16, 2008	
Department of Environmental Quality	318 Short-Term Water Quality
Turbidity Related to Construction	
Permit received, valid September 1, 2003-August 31, 2004	
Flathead County Sanitarian	sealed vault latrine permit
Flathead County Lakeshore Protection Program	lakeshore protection permit
Flathead County Floodplain Coordinator	no permit needed-Zone D not a designated floodplain

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount	
Land use Funds (based on a percentage of the appraised land value)		
FWP		100%
Fishing Access Site Acquisition Account (fishing license funds)		
FWP Capital Project Funds		
FWP	$41,250	25%
Fishing Access Site Capital Account		
Boat Fee In-Lieu of Tax Account		
Federal Sport Fish Restoration Funds		
Wallop-Breaux	$123,750	75%
Total	$165,000	100%

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Flathead County Planning Board-Echo Lake Zoning District	subdivision review zoning restrictions sign approval
Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation	lease agreement development approval
State Historic Preservation Office	cultural site protection
Montana Department of Transportation	sign approval
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	TES species protection wetlands conservation funding approval

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project, including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Proposed Action

DNRC would issue a lease agreement, or other type of land use authorization, to FWP to manage and improve a public fishing access site on Echo Lake using state school trust lands. In the future, DNRC would apply for a minor subdivision review of Government Lot 9 with the intent of dedicating land to FWP for the fishing access site. DNRC is in the process of writing a programmatic environmental assessment that addresses special land uses on school trust lands statewide, which must be completed prior to pursuing a request for subdivision. The overall intent of the project is to compensate the Trust Fund.

Note: This environmental assessment evaluates the potential impacts to the 5 acres leased to FWP and foreseeable cumulative effects as compared to existing resource conditions and proposed future improvements by FWP. Potential effects caused by subdivision or other uses of the remainder of Government Lot 9 are subject to future DNRC review.

FWP proposes to lease approximately 5 acres conveyed by a renewable land use authorization and future dedication from DNRC School Trust Lands Division.

The purpose of FWP entering the land use agreement is to improve the site to provide a public fishing access site (FAS) to Echo Lake with safe launching facilities, parking for 12 vehicles with trailers and 10 additional vehicles, efficient traffic routes, and sanitation facilities. Secondly, the purpose is to protect the resources, minimize impacts to adjacent neighbors, and protect the investments made at this site.

Looking north at proposed locations for boat ramp (far left), parking area (middle) and latrine. Sue Dalbey photo 4/16/03.

The development proposed at the site includes these items:

- approximately 650' of the existing Echo Cabin Loop Road improved to meet Flathead County standards;
- interior gravel loop road: improve about 500' of existing road and construct about 500' of new road;
- gravel parking lot for 12 vehicles with trailers, with one slot accessible to an FWP Level 2 (moderate) standard. About 5,000 cubic yards of local fill would be required in the wetland depression to raise elevation for parking area;
- gravel parking for 10 standard vehicles;
- gravel boat preparation area;
- hard-surface, single-width boat ramp down to average low water line and cable mat ramp under water;
- sealed vault latrine;
- compacted gravel trail connecting the parking area to latrine (moderate level of accessibility);
- entrance gate;
- parking barriers;
- existing latrine removal;
- block existing road north of site along lakeshore;
- perimeter boundary fencing;
- gravel host pad;
  - gravel entrance road,
  - utilities: water, electricity, septic system, telephone.

Agency Responsibilities

DNRC administers school trust lands with the mission to provide income for its beneficiaries, in this case, the Montana School of Mines. Land leases for various uses provide much of this revenue; the primary land use around Echo Lake is for residential development. DNRC periodically evaluates existing land uses and the earning potential of individual tracts. DNRC owns approximately 28 acres in Government Lot 9 of School Trust Lands adjacent to Echo Lake. The public currently uses this area for dispersed recreation. Though people who purchase a DNRC (state lands) permit are allowed to use this land, this type of use generates little revenue for the agency. In addition, much of the use occurring on the site is unauthorized (overnight use, campfires, off-road vehicle travel). DNRC is looking for ways to resolve these management problems while meeting its fiduciary responsibility and is willing to cooperate with FWP to help address the need for public access to Echo Lake.

FWP is given the responsibility of providing quality opportunities for public enjoyment of Montana's natural and recreational resources, yet protecting the resources. Funding for acquiring and managing these access sites comes from state fishing license sales, state taxes on motor boat fuel, and similarly generated federal funds that can be matched with nonfederal dollars.

Ideally, DNRC could choose a land use that would generate higher income, and FWP would use more land to provide a larger area for shoreline activities such as boat mooring, bank angling, picnicking, and parking.

The two state agencies are cooperating to find a solution that meets both agencies' responsibilities: DNRC's fiduciary responsibility and FWP's responsibility to provide lake access, public recreation, and appropriate facilities. The proposed action is a result of these discussions.

Lease Agreement Discussion and Terms

According to the Echo Lake Zoning District under the Flathead County Planning Board, this area is zoned as Suburban Agricultural (SAG5) and could be subdivided into five-acre (residential) lots or larger if approved by the Flathead County Commission. Please refer to the section map shown below.

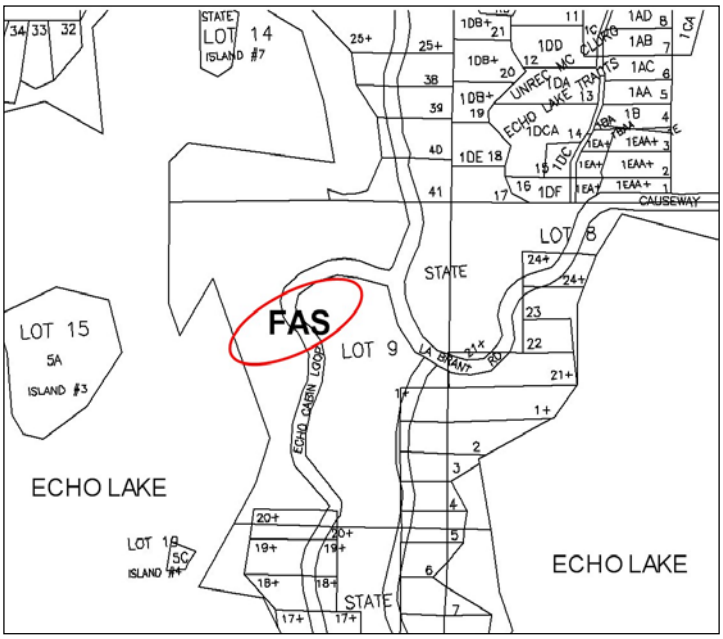
Though the exact parcel boundaries would be finalized prior to completing a land use agreement and construction, DNRC and FWP have tentatively identified five acres proposed for use as a fishing access site. The site is split nearly in half by the Echo Cabin Loop Road. About 2.4 acres adjacent to the lake would accommodate the primary site development for visitor services. Above Echo Cabin Loop Road (northeast of the lower parcel), 2.6 acres would provide space for a host pad with utilities.

A lease agreement would be issued by DNRC in the form of a lease agreement that would outline the length of contract, renewable options, fees, and reimbursement of investments should the contract be breeched. It is anticipated that the annual fee will be based on 3.5%

of the appraised land value to be paid on an annual basis and a term of 10 years. An appraisal would be completed prior to finalizing the agreement.

DNRC intends to apply for a minor subdivision of Government Lot 9 in the future, and when granted, the proposed FAS could be dedicated to FWP. This is the preferred action and if completed, would eliminate the annual fee assessed to FWP. This action and the projected schedule of activities relating to subdivision action would be outlined in the lease agreement.

FWP needs a long-term land use commitment (typically 20 years or the life of the improvements) from DNRC to receive the proposed Wallop-Breaux federal funding sources.



Need for Public Access to Echo Lake

Echo Lake is the second most highly visited lake in the Flathead Valley after Flathead Lake. Small cabins and large homes line the entire Echo Lake shoreline – some are on DNRC leased lands; some are on privately owned tracts. This warm water lake is tremendously popular for summer and winter fishing, swimming, water skiing, jet skiing, and picnicking. Visitation at the new FAS is difficult to estimate, since DNRC does not actively manage the causeway or area Government Lot 9 Trust Lands. Region 1 State Parks Manager Marty Watkins estimates that this new FAS may receive 20,000-30,000 visitors per year. This is based on formal FWP angler pressure estimates and visitation at other similar FWP sites in the region. The new site is expected to receive use from people currently using the Government Lot 9 Trust Lands, the causeway, from private home-

owners who don't have launching facilities or whose facilities are not functional during periods of low water.

Fisheries and Angler Use

This lake is 725 surface acres in size, with only about 125 acres deeper than 30 feet. The lake water levels tend to be influenced by ground water elevations, though this point is debated locally. Much of the lake refills from groundwater. Echo Lake water levels seem to fluctuate similarly to other lakes in the valley due to the glacial geology of the area and levels tend to be dependent upon annual water cycles. There are few perennial streams that enter the lake.

Echo Lake is classified as eutrophic. It is estimated that it takes 18-20 years for Echo Lake water to exchange because it has no outlet. This is an extremely slow exchange rate, which causes the lake to be rich in nutrients. Resulting algae blooms and low dissolved oxygen have contributed to fish kills some years. The lake does fluctuate about 3 feet in elevation on any given annual water cycle and has varied 10-12' over numerous years.

Because this lake is an isolated water body, many species have been introduced over many years. The warm water species have been most successful, now providing one of the better largemouth bass fisheries in northwestern Montana and the State. Northern pike and yellow perch are common game fish. Pumpkinseed and lake whitefish also inhabit the lake; brook trout can be found in the spring in-flow areas.

Under legislative direction, FWP stocks 150,000 kokanee, 10,000 rainbow trout over 10" long, and 50,000 rainbow trout about 4" long each year into Echo Lake.

FWP Angler Pressure Estimates in 2001 indicated that 5,370 angler days occurred on Echo Lake, down from 8,910 angler days annually in 1999 due to extremely low water levels in 2001.

Existing Public Access

DNRC currently owns and administers the only public access to Echo Lake. Description of the two access sites follows.

Causeway

This site is on the west end of the causeway, about one-half mile east of the proposed FAS. It is DNRC's intention that the proposed FAS would replace the need for public access at the causeway. However, the causeway will remain available for public lake access as an 'overflow' site or if the new access otherwise becomes temporarily unavailable (snow condition, etc.) Should vandalism or sanitation problems arise at the causeway, future use of site will be reevaluated. The causeway ramp is not usable during periods of low lake levels. If water levels are near the ramp, often water is too shallow and aquatic vegetation is too prolific to allow proper motorboat operation. Space is limited at this site to the extent that boaters obstruct the county road when launching and loading. Vehicles and boat trailers park along the edges of the county road creating single lane and unsafe traffic conditions. FWP has recently helped relieve sanitation problems by leasing and installing a portable latrine in the summer. Ten-to-fifteen vehicles and trailers are commonly seen at the DNRC causeway boat ramp.

DNRC Government Lot 9 Trust Lands (including the proposed FAS)

A faded wooden sign is nearly hidden under some tree branches along LaBrant Road pointing the way west on Echo Cabin Loop Road to the Government Lot 9 Trust Lands. A single-lane road traverses north-south through the area below the Loop Road and provides shoreline access to about 14 acres. When lake levels are low, access increases to peninsulas and islands, allowing for more dispersed recreation and unrestricted travel along the cobble shoreline.

People possessing a DNRC (state lands) permit are allowed to recreate on Government Lot 9 Trust Lands. This area is used year-round for watching wildlife, swimming, picnicking, hiking, and access for ice fishing. It does receive unauthorized use such as: camping, fires, and off-road vehicle traffic. Many people launch light boats from the cobble shoreline using four-wheel drive vehicles. Existing facilities include one useable, older, wooden latrine and two defunct/vandalized latrines. The area is recognized by area land managers from both agencies as a problematic site, at which people hold late night parties, vandalize latrines, light unauthorized camp fires, and leave litter.

It is estimated that 10-12 vehicles can be seen dispersed throughout Government Lot 9 on a typical summer weekend day. The proposed FAS would be located at the south end of the shoreline road where it connects to Echo Cabin Loop Road.

Proposed Development

Visitor Facilities

It is proposed that FWP will be responsible for the improvements leading to and within the new FAS. Local zoning requires that the existing northern entrance to Echo Cabin Loop Road must be improved to Flathead County standards to enable DNRC to subdivide the 28-acre Government Lot 9. This section of road would be 20’ to 24’ wide and about 650’ long from LaBrant Road to the new FAS entrance.

Interior roads would consist of a one-way loop. Half of the road currently exists, but needs improving. The interior loop road would be 12’ wide and about 1,000’ long. The loop would require removal of trees, cut and fill, grading, gravel base, and surface material installation. All areas around the construction project that are disturbed during installation would be seeded with a local grass mix to speed vegetative recovery, and reduce erosion and limit weed infestation. Upon completion of the new access, DNRC proposes to close the shoreline loop road, which accesses the remainder of Government Lot 9 Trust Land to vehicle use.

In an effort to provide adequate parking for the anticipated volume of visitation in the area identified for new facilities, it is proposed to fill an existing depression. According to calculations by the FWP project engineer based on the tract survey, the depression covers about 0.10 surface acres. The survey indicates it is below the Echo Lake high water mark. Local biologists recollect that the area is seasonally fed and flooded by ground water many years, but is dry during low water years. Fill for this area would total about 5,000 cubic yards from a local source.

The local DNRC forester and hydrologist visited the site to determine that this area was likely a historic wetland area, and was established prior to placement of the existing road fill. The region is riddled with shallow pothole lakes and depressions; soils in this region are generally well drained except in glacial depressions such as this. This depression wetlands site is nearly 90% covered in reed canary grass, a facultative wetland plant species. A similar wetland exists north of the subject tract boundary.

The proposed hard-surface, single-lane boat ramp would be sufficient to launch small or large boats during high or low water conditions. A 16% grade is designed to extend 45 feet beyond the low water. The causeway ramp and some private facilities around the lake are stranded during low water elevations; therefore, additional people are expected to use the FAS during these periods.

A single-stall, sealed vault latrine is proposed to maintain a sanitary site. This facility would be a typical prefabricated, concrete FAS latrine with aggregate finish, which would be fully accessible. Packed aggregate leading to the latrine would allow access from the parking area at an FWP Level 2, or moderate level of accessibility. One parking pad would be signed for use by people with disabilities. Ease of access to the water would depend upon water levels.

Most FASs are managed with a "pack in/pack out" garbage policy. Due to the anticipated high visitation at this site, it may be necessary to provide garbage service. Possibly one large, bear-proof container would be placed in the site so that it is available for visitor use, but not attractive to surrounding residents to deposit household trash.

Directional signs are proposed to be posted on Highway 35 and Highway 83 and LaBrant Road. A double-sided site identification sign would be located at the entrance to the site, along Echo Cabin Loop Road. Interior signs would include regulations, accessible parking, boat ramp and boat preparation area use signs (i.e., no parking on ramp), and one-way traffic directional signs.

Volunteer Host Pad

A gravel entrance road and pad is proposed on the 2.6 acres above Echo Cabin Loop Road. Utilities would be necessary at the site including electricity, water, septic system or sealed vault, and phone. Water service may be supplied by a cistern or well system. It is anticipated that this site would be occupied by a volunteer providing their own temporary accommodations.

The entrance road to the host pad and general location are shown in Appendix B; however, the design may change slightly when a full survey becomes available.

Site Management

Due to the high demand for public access to this lake, and lack of public access elsewhere on the lake, the trust land and the causeway ramp owned by DNRC have received high visitation. If the proposed actions are implemented, most public visitation in the future is expected to originate at the new FAS where new, functional facilities are provided. The

remainder of Government Lot 9 would accommodate walk-in activities in the immediate future; vehicle access would be restricted. The long-term availability of the area for dispersed recreational use will be considered at such time that the DNRC considers subdivision development for the remainder of Government Lot 9.

FWP proposes to manage the new 5-acre site as a day-use-only site. Due to its proximity to town and historic use, it is considered necessary to have a "host" living on-site to keep this area from having major safety and social impacts on adjacent neighbors. Without someone on-site, unauthorized use such as: overnight camping, unrestricted fires, vandalism to facilities and the environment, and nuisance noise is expected to continue. The FAS interior loop road would be gated where it meets Echo Cabin Loop Road. This would provide a means to manage the site as a day-use-only site and curb undesirable use.

FWP is mandated by statute to be a "good neighbor," with the goal of preventing impacts on adjoining private lands from trespass, litter, noise pollution, loss of privacy, and noxious weeds (Section 23-1-126, MCA). If DNRC decides to lease lots adjacent to the new FAS in order to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities, private cabin/home owners will be closer to the busy public access site. Due to the proposed new site design, picnicking and other shoreline recreational space along the shoreline will be reduced. These situations could lead to conflicts with adjacent private parties. FAS boundary fencing and signs can help prevent trespass on adjacent lands.

A volunteer host could be responsible for overseeing activities at the site, and could open and close the gate morning and night. It is becoming increasingly difficult to simply hire a security company to open and close gates at state parks and FASs due to the nature of the work. An on-site host could contact FWP enforcement personnel or the sheriff's office immediately if visitors become unruly or vandalize the site. This on-site presence and ability to react promptly to misconduct will help curb unwanted activities and disturbance to neighbors, as well as reduce vandalism to the site. Past use indicates that an enforcement presence will be needed at this site to help control unauthorized activities.

Minor maintenance would be completed by the volunteer host, such as some litter pick-up and stocking the latrine with paper. More thorough maintenance would be conducted by a seasonal FAS caretaker once or twice a week depending on the season. This caretaker would clean the latrine, pick up litter, replace signs, repair fences, and make other necessary repairs at the FAS.

Adequate and proper management of a highly visited and heavily used site, such as the proposed FAS, demands staff and funding, and management will be a challenge for FWP.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably

available and prudent to consider, and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

All proposed action alternatives are contingent upon receipt of the proper local, state, and federal permits. Construction projects discussed in the alternatives would be completed based on a design approved by FWP and DNRC, and subject to State guidelines. The FWP Design and Construction Bureau would administer bids for a consultant and oversight of the construction project by contracted services. Funding sources are proposed from a combination of FWP Fishing Access Site program (fishing license) dollars, State Boat-in-Lieu funds, and federal Wallop-Breaux Sportfish Restoration funds.

Alternative A - No Action

If no action is taken, DNRC would not issue any type of land use authorization to FWP, and FWP would not develop a fishing access site on Echo Lake. DNRC would continue to allow dispersed public recreation on Government Lot 9 Trust Lands in the immediate future. The 0.10-acre wetlands would not be filled, thus retaining any potential use by amphibians, reptiles, and songbird species. The area would likely continue to be the cause of complaints from neighboring cabin owners concerning human noise and misconduct due to the low level of management at the site. DNRC would explore other opportunities to generate income from this land, such as a residential or private recreational lease.

If public access is not improved to Echo Lake, local complaints would likely continue regarding the lack of public access to this high quality, warm-water fisheries and popular site for water-based recreation. As residential development continues in the Flathead Valley, public access to recreational opportunities becomes more scarce as the population increases, and the land base continues to be privatized and closed to the public.

Alternative B – DNRC leases entire Government Lot 9 Trust Lands (28 acres) to private entities.

Under Alternative B, DNRC may request a minor subdivision of Government Lot 9 and lease parcels for home sites or other uses to maximize income to the Trust Fund. Under this option, FWP would not take part in a land use authorization to provide public access to Echo Lake. It could be possible for a private entity to lease a portion of or the entire 28 acres, then develop a private boat access to the lake, perhaps to be managed by a local homeowners association.

DNRC could decide to lease all of Government Lot 9 for cabin sites, which would likely close the area to dispersed public recreation and lake access. This option would likely relieve neighboring complaints regarding vandalism and nuisance noise. Traffic may increase compared to existing use depending on the number of home sites developed and if private boat access is developed.

Alternative B would accommodate only a small interest group.

Alternative C - FWP to purchase a permanent easement.

This alternative could be pursued; however, FWP funding may not be available. This alternative may require different property boundaries to make the parcel affordable, and could possibly require redesigning the site plan based on the new land configuration. This alternative would be subject to subdivision review and, therefore, be postponed two or more years. DNRC committed to waiting until November 2004 when the Real Estate Management Bureau Programmatic EIS is completed prior to beginning the minor subdivision application process.

If parcel boundaries and/or site design changed significantly, a supplement to this EA or a new assessment would be needed to evaluate impacts of the project.

The preferred alternative has been pursued due to the possibility of subdivision and potential for the land to be dedicated to FWP in the future, thus allowing state agencies to cooperate for the benefit of the public.

In the following Alternatives D-G only the level of FWP development on the site varies. Each of these alternatives include the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between DNRC and FWP and a lease agreement regarding approximately 5 acres issued by DNRC and accepted by FWP. These alternatives are based on a long-term (10 years estimated) lease agreement with the potential future dedication of the land to FWP after DNRC would apply for and receive approval for minor subdivision. The annual fee to FWP would be based on 3.5% of the land appraised value.

Alternative D - Low Level of Development: boat ramp and adjacent gravel work.
Alternative D would provide a boat ramp at the proposed location with minor improvements to existing gravel surrounding the ramp to provide adequate maneuverability while launching. This level of development was originally proposed in 2002, to improve lake boat access during low water when the causeway boat ramp was not functional. It was determined that this low level of improvement would not meet visitors' needs due to lack of space to accommodate parking.

This alternative would have little impact on the wetlands and surrounding vegetation since construction would occur on land previously disturbed. Increased but undirected visitor use, however, would impact the resources to a greater level than existing conditions. Indiscriminate, off-road vehicle travel along the shoreline and timbered slopes would increase as more people attempted to launch boats, park, and picnic. Site management would continue to be at a low level by DNRC and FWP, but visitation would increase, resulting in more complaints of inappropriate activities throughout Government Lot 9 Trust Land. Litter and vandalism would likely increase in the area.

Alternative E - Develop land below Echo Cabin Loop Road only: boat ramp, parking, latrine facilities; no development above loop road

This alternative would provide the facilities proposed, but would not include a volunteer host pad on the upper parcel. This alternative is not the preferred alternative because Region 1 FWP and DNRC staff acknowledge that this site receives and will continue to receive an inordinate amount of misuse without greater agency presence. FWP strives to develop sites that will promote a cooperative and neighborly relationship with adjacent landowners (or lease-holders). Developing the proposed site will attract most public lake access to this new site.

Past vandalism and nuisance activities at this site warrant consideration of future similar activities. FWP has researched the possibility of awarding a contract to open/close the entrance gate daily to help reduce unauthorized activities, but has been unsuccessful in finding a party willing to take that type of contract. Contracted services to open/close the site gate daily, if found, would incur an additional cost. A paid FAS caretaker would be required to visit the site more often to complete minor maintenance than if a volunteer host lived on-site and would complete these basic duties in exchange for lot space (rent). Maintenance costs could be compounded with an increase in new facilities, but without on-site staff to help minimize vandalism; new facilities could be expensive to repair.

Though human environment impacts would be greater without a host, impacts to the physical environment as a result of implementing Alternative E would be slightly less than the proposed development, since the upper 2.6 acres would not undergo construction. Construction costs for this alternative would be approximately $120,000, plus annual land use fees to be determined.

With the establishment of the proposed FAS, pressure to retain the causeway ramp would be somewhat relieved and DNRC could periodically review its status based on sanitation, environmental issues related to low water, traffic issues, vandalism, need as overflow, and other potential uses.

Alternative F - Phased Development: Phase I boat ramp, parking, latrine facilities; Phase II future host pad with utilities

Alternative F is the same as the Proposed Action; however, the upper parcel and host pad would not be developed until other funding is secured. Environmental impacts would be similar to the Proposed Action. Impacts to the human environment would be greater prior to implementing the volunteer host program. As discussed in Alternative E, opening and closing gates to the site daily would help reduce unwanted nighttime activities in the interim, but these security services are difficult to obtain.

Alternative F is not the preferred action because it would be contingent upon additional funding becoming available for additional land use fees and capital improvements. Many times, Phase II projects are not completed for several years, if ever. It is the goal of FWP to be a responsible steward of this project and minimize impacts to adjacent landowners, which FWP feels is best accomplished with a host living on-site. Vandalism to the new facilities would also be reduced with the presence of a host.

Alternative F, however, does provide a "test period" to determine if indiscriminate activities will continue with the new, more open parking area and improved access to the site. In some cases, these activities may slightly decrease when the site is improved to a formal public access, including signage, and with the additional control provided by an entrance gate. If unwanted activities seem to continue at an unacceptably high level, then the host pad could be added later. Funds for Phase II would likely come from the Fishing Access Site capital improvement account.

Costs to implement Phase I are estimated at $120,000, plus land use fees. Costs to implement Phase II are estimated at about $40,000, plus inflation and land use fees.

With the establishment of the proposed FAS, pressure to retain the causeway ramp would be somewhat relieved, and DNRC could periodically review its status based on sanitation, environmental issues related to low water, traffic issues, vandalism, need as overflow, and other potential uses.

Preferred Alternative G - Proposed Action: boat ramp, parking, latrine facilities, host pad with utilities

Alternative G is the preferred alternative, as proposed and analyzed in the EA. The proposed action gives DNRC the ability to plan for long-term development and subdivision. In the short term, DNRC receives income from FWP and county road development support. DNRC can also pursue a minor subdivision proposition, which provides long-term increased income to the Trust Fund, yet dedicates the land to FWP and provides affordable land benefiting the public recreation interest.

The primary goal of FWP is to improve public access to Echo Lake, with secondary goals to minimize impacts to adjacent landowners (lease holders), protect the resources and investments made at this site. FWP feels that these goals would be best accomplished with personnel on-site. A volunteer host program is economically feasible and successful in the State Parks system and has potential for similar success at FASs.

The host pad is a large initial cost, but costs of utilities may balance the costs of 20 hours per week of labor for the opening/closing gates daily, stocking the latrine, minimizing vandalism and neighbor complaints, and calling local law enforcement when needed to prevent major disruptive activities.

Overall construction costs are estimated at $165,000, plus land use fees for the 5 acres.

With the establishment of the proposed FAS, pressure to retain the causeway ramp would be somewhat relieved and DNRC could periodically review its status based on sanitation, environmental issues related to low water, traffic issues, vandalism, need as overflow, and other potential uses.

Additional Alternatives Discussed, but No Longer Considered Feasible

Alternative H: DNRC could lease the subject parcel to a private party for use as a cabin site. DNRC has not explored this alternative completely, since they have agreed to cooperate with FWP in an effort to fulfill the public desire for access to Echo Lake. Leasing the subject property to a private party would increase income to the trust account. Less traffic would access the area, and noise complaints may subside. Unauthorized camping and fires would likely decrease, as well, if the land is gated and fenced. This alternative would have a greater impact on the public, especially if much of the remaining shoreline in Government Lot 9 is also leased to private entities, thus eliminating dispersed public recreation along Echo Lake.

Alternative I: FWP could lease the causeway ramp site and actively manage it as an FAS. This is a poorer access site as discussed previously in this document. Water levels can be too shallow to provide access even if a new boat ramp was constructed. Aquatic vegetation often preempts safe boating. There is not sufficient space between the county road and the lake to allow for safe and easy boat launching, nor is there adequate space for safe and efficient traffic patterns or parking. This site does provide picnicking, canoeing, and possibly overflow access if the new site becomes crowded, and should be retained for public access.

Alternative J: FWP could accept more land from DNRC.
This alternative would provide a longer shoreline or additional land adjacent to the proposed site to help accommodate uses such as picnicking, boat mooring, swimming, and additional parking. The current boundaries were agreed upon by both agencies in an attempt to best carry out their respective responsibilities. To maximize potential future income generation for their beneficiaries and retain future land use options, it may be in the best interest for DNRC to retain as much shoreline and land as possible. In an effort to provide public recreational opportunities in an efficient and cost effective manner, FWP wants to minimize land use costs, and thus keep the area of land to a minimum needed to accommodate expected public use. If more land is needed to provide a better access or accommodate either agency's needs for future development, open space management after subdivision, or leasing capabilities, this alternative may be revisited.

Alternative K: Construct additional public parking on upper parcel.
This additional development is not preferred at this time due to the additional cost and lack of survey data demonstrating a need for more parking space at this time. In addition, the upper area is heavily timbered with steep slopes and a deep ravine. These attributes would require added vegetation removal, large cuts, or large volumes of fill to create level parking. The associated costs are prohibitive to FWP at this time. This alternative will be considered during the design of the project, however, to allow space for additional parking in the future if necessary.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		Yes	1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?			X			1c.
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		Yes	1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1a. Constructing the proposed roads, parking area, boat ramp, and latrine will not alter the geologic substructure. This work will primarily require fill material with only shallow cuts into surface earth to smooth road intersections. The removal of the old latrine will include filling the old vault and excavating a hole for a new sealed vault placement. In both cases, the holes will be filled, eliminating the potential for soil movement. Best Management Practices (erosion control techniques) will be implemented to ensure stable road bank and lakeshore slopes.

1b. Proposed roads, parking area, boat ramp, and latrine will increase disruption, displacement, compaction, and over-covering of soils. This increased hardening of the site will reduce total vegetative productivity in this 5 acres; however, by localizing public use to this small area, the surrounding areas would be less impacted from the current unauthorized vehicle use. Impacts will be mitigated by planting a local grass seed mix in areas disrupted by construction. The site design purposefully utilizes land that has been disturbed in the past by developed roads and indiscriminate visitor traffic, which illustrates areas of high public use. Rock road barriers will eliminate future vehicle traffic off designated routes, thus localizing use and allowing higher fertility and production on the remainder of the site. Implementing BMPs during construction would minimize erosion in the short term during construction, with no increase in erosion in the long term.

1c. The wetlands area at this site is not unique to the Echo Lake area, as several occur within a half mile of this site and at other locations in this region. According to DNRC

Forester Beverly O'Brien, this region between Lake Blaine and Mud Lake is riddled with shallow pothole lakes and depressions (kettle/moraine). This project will fill in a 0.10-acre depression to provide space for a gravel-surfaced parking lot (electronic communication from Terry Campbell, FWP Project Engineer). Other area potholes and depressions similar in size and character are on adjacent School Trust lands and would be subject to their guidelines for future activities on those properties.

1d. The site design uses fill material to expand and elevate the parking pad above high water levels. This fill will slightly increase the lakeshore grade (steeper) in some locations, though retain the general lakeshore contours. Temporary and minor siltation or erosion may occur, but FWP requires the use of silt fences or other erosion management devices to curtail these impacts due to precipitation events during and immediately after construction. The shoreline parking area and boat ramp were designed with consultation from the FWP Regional Fisheries Manager with the intent to minimize fill into the lake, stabilize shoreline features, and elevate the parking pad. The potential siltation, deposition, and erosion will be nominal with this design and natural gravel attributes; in addition, FWP requires that fill material is clean. Temporary erosion controls are a standard requirement during construction projects conducted by FWP contractors.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)			X			2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		Yes	2b.
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by heavy equipment improving and constructing the entrance road, interior roads, boat ramp, and parking areas. Visitation is expected to increase to this site; therefore, vehicle-created dust levels are expected to slightly increase on the Echo Cabin Loop Road.

2b. Vault latrines often cause a very localized, minimal odor. FWP current latrine design, seasonal pumping, and odor controls can reduce offensive odors. The new facilities would be a considerable improvement over the existing latrine on-site.

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3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?			X		Yes	3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		Yes	3b.
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?			X			3c.
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?			X			3d.
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?			X		Yes	3e.
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?			X		Yes	3g.
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?			X positive			3h.
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				See comment 3g. below
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				See comment 3c. below
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)			X			See comment 3a. below
n. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3a. Minor and temporary turbidity would occur in Echo Lake during and immediately after construction of the new roads and parking area. Use of silt fencing or other temporary erosion control measures will reduce potential erosion from road-related construction entering the lake should rainfall cause a runoff event. Immediately after construction, surrounding disturbed areas will be seeded with a local grass mix to expedite vegetative regrowth and reduce future erosion. Standard FWP BMPs will be implemented to also reduce potential erosion. FWP consulted with the Department of Environmental Quality and received a short-term water quality exemption permit.

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3b. Vegetation removal to construct the new and improved roads and the entrance road and host pad will cause a slight increase in surface runoff. Hard-packed gravel surfaces will also slightly increase the rate and amount of runoff. The project design and implementing BMPs during construction will create drainage patterns that minimize the impacts of minor additional runoff.

3c. This area is not mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Administration and is listed as a Zone D area on the FIRM Index (Flood Insurance Rate Map, Panel 300023-2310 D). The floodplain map for the north half of Echo Lake is not printed. Consultation with the Flathead County Planner and Floodplain Coordinator Mark Crowley (personal communication on May 21, 2003) revealed that the proposed site is not in a designated floodplain and does not fall within the jurisdiction of the state DNRC Floodplain Management Office nor Flathead County. The depression proposed for parking, road, and boat ramp construction would be filled and would displace groundwater totaling about 0.10 acre of a surface acre, depending on precipitation cycles. Echo Lake water levels seem to be influenced primarily by ground water elevations and spring action, not perennial stream flows; however, the lake does not have an outlet. DNRC Hydrologist Tony Nelson projects that filling the depression would have little impact to flooding in the area (personal communication May 5, 2003).

3d. Filling the depression to construct parking would eliminate about a 0.10 acre of intermittent surface water. This depression periodically holds water, depending upon ground water levels and annual precipitation. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has granted FWP a permit to fill this area.

3e. The proposed boat ramp and improved parking facilities would replace and improve access to Echo Lake over existing lack of facilities offered at the subject site and the causeway ramp. The new facilities may attract more people to the lake and the inherent risks associated with water; however, improved access should increase safety during certain access activities such as launching and loading boats. In addition, the presence of a formal facility, which directs boating activities and has posted regulations such as no-wake zones, helps boaters to be more conscientious regarding their own activities and interactions with other lake users. A 200'-from-shore no-wake zone is a standard regulation in the Western Fishing District.

3g. An on-site host would need a water supply, which would be supplied by a well or cistern system. This use typically consumed by a couple in a recreational vehicle (estimated at about 50 gallons a day), is not expected to notably impact ground water quantities. Existing water wells in the area range from 30-to-280 feet deep (June 2002 water logs for Flathead County: *http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us/wrd/home.htm.*) DNRC does not require a permit for wells under 35 gallons per minute, and use of this well would be under that limit. The septic system is subject to county approval, and though a conventional drain field is preferred, this may need to be modified to meet local guidelines. All necessary permits would be attained by FWP or the consultant prior to construction for the septic system. No major impacts are anticipated to surface or ground water quantities.

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3h. Improving access to Echo Lake would expedite launching and loading actions and reduce the risk of petroleum fuels entering the water, compared to current use of cobble shoreline with difficult, loose traction.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		Yes	4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?			X			See comment 4a. below
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. The proposed construction and improvements of roads will require the removal of about half an acre of vegetation for widening of existing roads and constructing about 350' of new interior loop road. The Echo Cabin Loop Road and existing section of the loop road will require widening by two-to-six feet, while the new section of interior loop road will require complete clearing of timbered land. This area is dominated by Douglas fir, western larch, and lodge pole pine forest, with little undergrowth and a large amount of decaying downfall in areas receiving little public use. The area proposed for the new loop road section has little undergrowth, presumably due to human traffic. Most trees range in size from 6-to-14 inches in diameter, though one 24"-diameter larch is near the proposed road.

DNRC Forester Beverly O'Brien, Hydrologist Tony Nelson, Special Uses and Right-of-Way Specialist Steve Lorch, and Norm Merz visited the site on May 9, 2003. As defined under ARM 36.11.426 (4)(a)(i-iii), the wetland plant species composition criteria is met on this site, as 90% of the wetland is occupied with reed canary grass *(Phalaris arundinacea).* This species is listed as a Faculative Wetland species in Appendix A-2 of *Classification and Management of Montana's Riparian and Wetland Sites* by Paul L. Hansen, Robert D.Pfister, Keith Boggs, Bradley J. Cook, John Joy, and Dan K. Hinckley; Montana Forest and Conservation Experiment Station, School of Forestry, UM, Missoula, MT, May 1995, Misc Pub # 54. The size of this wetland designation is less than 1/4 acre. O'Brien is fairly confident that the wetland is an isolated depression

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commonly found in this area between Lake Blaine and Mud Lake, which is riddled with similar shallow potholes. She advised that wetland definitions or designations vary by agency (electronic communication dated May 21, 2003).

FWP project engineer Terry Campbell estimated that the wetlands proposed to be covered/filled to accommodate the parking area and latrine is about 0.10 acre in size, based on calculations from the site survey prepared by Sands Surveying, Inc., of Kalispell, Montana.

The upper 2.6 acres proposed for the host pad is largely undisturbed. Though this part of the project is roughly designed, it is estimated that about one quarter of an acre of vegetation would be removed for the construction of an entrance road and gravel pad, septic system, and other utilities. This area is predominated by a conifer mix, but includes more undergrowth of younger conifer species, serviceberry, and various associated ground cover species.

The site design purposefully utilizes existing formal and pioneered roads to reduce the impacts to vegetation. The shoreline and part of the parking area is void of vegetation due to prior human use and cobblestone character. Trees and other vegetation will be removed only within the immediate path of the proposed improvements. Efforts will be made to retain larger vegetation whenever possible.

This area north of Echo Lake is not considered prime or unique farmland according to Resource Soil Scientist Neal Svendsen with Missoula U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (personal communication May 13, 2003). The Soil Survey for the Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana, identifies this area as Waits and Krause stony loams with 12-40 percent slopes (Wn), which is not suitable for farming (page 54 of Soil Surveys Series 1946, No. 4).

4c. A search by the Montana Natural Heritage Program for species of special concern identified four species, all of which are located over two miles from the project site (written communication March 20, 2003). The species identified are: giant helleborine (*Epipactis gigantea*), watershield (*Brasenia schreberi*), buckler fern (*Dryopteris cristata*) and Guadalupe water-nymph (*Najas guadalupensis*).

The identified species are not listed under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Act, but are considered sensitive by the U.S. Forest Service. As ranked by the Heritage Program, the first species is apparently globally secure, but is sparsely distributed within its range; the remaining three species are demonstrably secure, though they may be quite rare in parts of its range. Statewide, the first three of the four species are imperiled because of rarity; the water-nymph is considered critically imperiled, occurring in Montana at the outer margins of its contiguous range, but is abundant locally in “high quality” aquatic communities consisting of backwater about 0.5 meters deep. The watershield and buckler fern species were found at Mud Lake area, which has a more stable water source and is generally a marshy environment. Each species has also been identified in at least three other counties in Montana (Heidel, B. 2001. Plant Species of Concern. Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena. 38pp).

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DNRC Forester Beverly O'Brien stated that these species of special concern were not observed during a site visit May 9, 2003 with three other DNRC staff members, including DNRC Hydrologist Tony Nelson, Special Uses and Right-of-Way Specialist Steve Lorch, and Norm Merz (electronic communication dated May 21, 2003).

4e. Construction and additional traffic tend to increase the possibility of noxious weeds becoming established. Seeding of disrupted soils after construction limits the potential for additional weed infestation by providing competition from a mix of hearty local grasses. FWP staff will closely monitor the site in the short term after construction and regularly on a long-term basis. This site would be incorporated into the Region 1 weed management program, and weeds will be treated under the guidelines of the FWP Region 1 Weed Management Plan and the County Weed District.

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** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X		yes	5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X		yes	5c.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		yes	See comment 5f. below
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish and Wildlife (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

This relatively small and shallow lake is primarily influenced by spring in-flow and ground water elevations. There is no water outlet; therefore, water retention times are extensive, also contributing to eutrophic conditions. FWP Fisheries Manager Jim Vashro indicated that the lake may fluctuate 3 feet in elevation during any single year's water cycle, and varies 10-12 feet over numerous years, depending on long-term drought or high precipitation (personal communication May 1, 2003).

FWP Fisheries Biologist Scott Rumsey related to Sue Dalbey (personal communication April 24, 2003) that because this lake is an isolated water body, many species have been introduced over many years. The warm water species have been most successful, including the largemouth bass, which has developed into one of the better fisheries in the northwest region and the state. Northern pike and yellow perch are also common game fish found in Echo Lake. Pumpkinseed and lake whitefish inhabit the lake; brook trout can be found near the spring in-flow areas. Under legislative direction, FWP has stocked 150,000 kokanee, 10,000 rainbow trout over 10" long, and 50,000 rainbow trout about 4" long annually into Echo Lake.

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FWP Angler Pressure Estimates have averaged 6,949 angler days over the last three estimate periods (1997, 1999, 2001), with an average of 84% of use from Montana anglers. Estimates for 2001 indicated that 5,370 angler days occurred on Echo Lake, down from 8,910 angler days annually in 1999. This drop was likely due to extreme low water conditions in recent years.

FWP Wildlife Biologist Tom Litchfield does not feel that this project will warrant significant impacts due to the lack of critical wildlife habitat. Increased human use at the specific project site, combined with the high number of seasonal cabins and year-round homes, likely preclude use by many large and small animals. The cobble shoreline of Echo Lake is not conducive to waterfowl nesting.

The Echo Lake area is a mixed-conifer forest and inhabited by game species such as white-tailed deer and black bear. This site is in the grizzly bear recovery zone, and they may occasionally pass through this area, especially in spring. Bald eagle and osprey, Canada goose, golden eye, and a variety of other waterfowl use the lake. Other common nongame mammals that likely use the area include: raccoon, squirrels, and a variety of songbirds and birds of prey.

5b. The increased concentration of humans and proposed removal of vegetation at the new FAS would displace most game species that currently use the site. White-tailed deer would avoid the site during and immediately after construction, but would likely adapt to the changes over time and return to use the site sporadically during periods of low human use. FWP Biologist Tom Litchfield indicated that grizzly bears and black bears may pass through and be slightly more attracted to this site by human food smells including garbage, though covered “bear-proof” trash containers would be used at the site. Waterfowl are not anticipated to be impacted to a large degree due to the poor shoreline habitat and existing human activity at this site and the entire lake. If the adjacent School Trust lands are leased to private entities, the FAS and the additional residential development would cumulatively displace game animals and add to the likelihood of human/bear conflicts. (Personal communication April 23, 2003.) Designating the site for day-use only would slightly improve the ability of wildlife to use the site, since many are nocturnal.

According to FWP Fish Biologist Scott Rumsey and Fisheries Manager Jim Vashro, the project is not expected to impact the fisheries resources, though it would greatly benefit anglers.

5c. As with game species, the high concentration of human use and removal of vegetation for roads and parking would displace nongame species that currently use the site. Several other potholes and depressions exist nearby on School Trust land, which may also provide similar wetland habitat for these species. Kristian Skybak, FWP Fisheries Fieldworker with herpetology training and who has completed several similar surveys for FWP, inspected the pothole proposed for filling on June 12, 2003. The site was dry and the only species present was a common garter snake (*Standardized Data Form for Lentic Breeding Amphibian and Aquatic Reptile Survey* form dated 6/12/03). The project does utilize existing roads in an effort to reduce the removal of vegetation.

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5f. A database search by the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified three species listed as threatened under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Act: the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), the Canada lynx (*Felis lynx*), and the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*).

The nearest bald eagle nest is about one mile away from the proposed construction. Construction is proposed to begin after Labor Day and be completed by spring of 2004, which would pose little impact to nesting eagles, particularly at this distance. The new FAS would concentrate human activity at this site; however, overall use of the lake is not expected to increase substantially, allowing continued eagle use of the area. There is not a lack of suitable habitat for this species in the Flathead Valley according to FWP Wildlife Biologist Tom Litchfield.

Litchfield indicated that the site does not provide good habitat for lynx. This vicinity is too low, dry, open, and developed. He stated that lynx need continuous conifer cover with a high population of snowshoe hare, which this area lacks. The new FAS is unlikely to impact lynx.

Grizzly bears (and black bears) do inhabit this area, especially in the spring when they come to lower elevations searching emerging vegetation. Biologist Litchfield proposed that the construction of the project would not directly impact grizzlies; however, the tendency for associated human conflicts may rise. Bears would be attracted to garbage and fish entrails left on-site. An on-site host and management of the recreation that incurs at this site will reduce bear attractants. A pack-in/pack-out policy or use of “bear proof” garbage receptacles, posting signs for proper garbage disposal, frequent garbage disposal service, and visitor education will also reduce the possibility for human/bear conflicts.

The black tern (*Chlidonias niger*) was also found in the Natural Heritage Program database. The black tern is apparently secure globally, though it may be quite rare in parts of its range. The observation took place over five miles from the proposed FAS, which would not be likely to impact this nesting site.

Biologist Litchfield does not anticipate notable impacts to these species from proposed project; the current human activity and existing residential use in the surrounding area already discourages use of the area by all four of these species.

No fish species of special concern are located in Echo Lake.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X positive			See comment 6a. below
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Effects (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6a. New and more easily accessible facilities at the proposed site will cause an increase in vehicle and human activity at the proposed 5-acre FAS. Use at the causeway is expected to largely transfer to this site. Area residents may also use this site during periods of low water when private facilities may be unusable. Overall noise from boaters and watercraft users may increase during the day, and use will likely occur during more days of the year, extending the boating season given the ability to access the lake during low water and designated off-road parking. Formal routes, signs, gates, and more agency presence will promote visitor compliance with day-use regulations. Unauthorized night activities and associated nuisance noise should be limited with these features.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?			X Positive			7a.
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?			X Positive			7c.
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?			X		Yes	7d.
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Use (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. The proposed land use increases the productivity and profitability of the land for DNRC. FWP would lease the 5-acre tract from DNRC, and it is possible that DNRC will lease out the surrounding lands for private use. These leases would increase income to DNRC and reduce management costs to DNRC.

Developing a formal boat ramp with parking and a latrine would be compatible with the existing angling and recreational use of Echo Lake. DNRC currently owns the only public access to the lake, and boats often cannot access the lake due to low water and inadequate facilities. Developing the proposed site will make this site and Echo Lake more accessible to the public.

7c. The site is currently used for small boat launching and public recreation; the proposed FAS compliments existing use of the site and lake. The proposed project improves launching facilities for anglers and boat recreationists. Shoreline recreation may decrease due to the proposed reduced land base available to the public.

7d. Some adjacent neighbors may oppose the development of this site creating increased visitation and traffic at this access point. Improvements of the Echo Cabin Loop Road would mitigate impacts to the road caused by increased traffic. It is convenient to have public, open land adjacent to a home site. An added agency presence, however, can reduce the amount of misbehavior, nuisance noise, late night parties, vandalism, and other unauthorized use that many neighbors dislike about having public land next door.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		Yes	8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?			X		Yes	8b.
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X		Yes	8c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X		Yes	See comment 8a. below
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8a. Chemical spray is part of the FWP weed management program, incorporated into a total program including biological and mechanical weed control methods. Weed treatment would be conducted only by trained personnel under guidelines in the FWP Region 1 Weed Management Plan.

The potential for petroleum products to enter the water would be reduced since the risk of vehicles getting stuck on the shoreline during launching/loading would be reduced by installing a hard-surface boat ramp. In addition, the ramp would provide good access at low water levels, unlike the existing public ramps and some private ramps on Echo Lake.

8b. The new FAS would be integrated into existing FWP emergency response plans.

8c. This lake receives a high level of use from a variety of users. The primary intent of this access is to improve public access, including signs and visitor education regarding water safety, boating safety, and no-wake zones, to induce slower speeds along shorelines. The FWP Enforcement Division regularly patrols the lake to educate and check boaters for safe operation and equipment.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?			X		Yes	9a.
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?			X		Yes	9b.
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X		Yes	9e.
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Impact (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9a. Improving access at the new FAS will increase the human density due to the desire of boaters to use the high quality facilities. Daily visitation will be limited by the parking spaces available at the site. The summer season, from about May 1 to September 1, is expected to receive the highest visitation. The new facilities are expected to allow physical access during periods of low water, unlike existing conditions; therefore, an increase in visitation is expected during the shoulder spring and fall seasons as well. Improved roads and parking will also allow easy access to the lake in the winter for ice fishing.

This annual increase in use at the new FAS will be managed using a loop road design with adequate boat preparation area, hard-surface boat ramp, and designated parking. The hardened surfaces will help limit impacts to the physical environment. The site design will allow organized and safe use. A new vault latrine will help keep the site sanitary. It is anticipated that the new facilities will cause a drop in visitation at the causeway. Dispersed recreation in the remainder of Government Lot 9 Trust Lands may decrease slightly when closed to motor vehicles. It is anticipated that boat launching at the causeway will also decrease when the new facilities are opened at the FAS, due to the deeper water and hard-surface boat ramp, safer parking, and latrine facilities.

The type of use at the new FAS will slightly change from a picnicking and shoreline recreation to more use by boaters after the facilities are in place. The steep slope and short length of FAS shoreline will limit some activities. The remainder of Government Lot 9 will continue to accommodate picnicking and shoreline activities in the immediate future; however, vehicle access will not be allowed along the existing single-lane shoreline road.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

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9b. The proposed development would likely cause most public boaters using the causeway to shift their use to the new FAS. Long-time residents in this area may dislike the change in use patterns at the site. It is anticipated that the potential for negative impacts caused by higher visitation would be minimized with the presence of an on-site host. The site design with designated roads and parking would limit off-road use. Formal development of a site will attract visitors who are less likely to participate in unauthorized activities. Closing the site at night would limit nuisance activities common in the past.

9e. Traffic would increase on both the LaBrant Road and the Echo Cabin Loop Road. FAS approach signs would aid in alerting drivers to potential turning traffic prior to both intersections, as well as on Highway 35 and Highway 83. The project calls for widening and improving the Echo Cabin Loop Road, which would provide better road conditions and less congested traffic movement. A site identification sign would alert drivers to turning traffic on Echo Cabin Loop Road at the FAS entrance. Vehicle use at the FAS would increase relative to existing use at this specific site. Boating use may increase annually because the new ramp will provide access during low water levels.

Increased signage, education regarding boating regulations and no wake zones, and the development of formal launching and parking facilities will help mitigate congestion and enhance safety compared to historic haphazard boating and launching activities at the subject site.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify: *police protection, recreational facilities, roads, water supply, septic systems, solid waste disposal*			X		yes	10a.
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			X			10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?			X		yes	10c.
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?			X		Yes	See comment 10c. below
e. **Define projected revenue sources						See comment 10e. below
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						See comment 10f. below
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. FAS facilities will require additional maintenance by FWP State Parks staff, including cleaning, repair, litter pick-up, garbage removal, weed management, and vault latrine pumping. Windy conditions will spread some litter to vegetation, adjacent property, and the lake. Roads will need grading every 3-5 years or as needed. The host pad will require upkeep to maintain and monitor the water system and septic system.

The preferred way to manage a day-use FAS with the history of inappropriate use of this site is through the opening and closing of an entrance gate each morning and evening. Region 1 State Parks Manager Marty Watkins stated that contracted security services will not accept a contract for these duties due to the enforcement issues when evicting visitors at dark (personal communication April 16, 2003). A volunteer, on-site host is the preferred means of providing this opening and closing service and will also provide the agency presence that would discourage misconduct by site visitors. In exchange for conducting basic services at the site, the host would be provided a pad on which to park a trailer, electricity, water, and sewer hookups (to a septic system).

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

An increase in enforcement is anticipated at the site. A volunteer host would not be expected to enforce the site regulations, but to immediately call an FWP warden or local Sheriff's Department deputy to respond to a disruptive or unauthorized activity.

Typically, an FAS attendant would be assigned to help maintain this site; however, increased funding and staffing for this position is not secure and may have to be redirected from other sites.

The volunteer host could do some maintenance and visitor service duties such as checking the paper supply in the latrine or picking up litter. Contracted services could conduct some activities under guidance from the Region 1 FWP staff, if funding is available.

10b. State FWP funds (fishing license fees) would pay land use fees to state DNRC accounts for use of the 5 acres.

10c. New visitor services would not require utilities. The host pad would require utilities to allow a volunteer to live on-site. Electricity, phone (and water) would be brought into the site. An overhead power line exists at the intersection of LaBrant and Echo Cabin Loop Road; therefore, electricity would be relatively close to the host pad. A propane tank may be placed near the host pad for heating and cooking purposes.

10e. The public would not be charged fees to use the site; therefore, FWP would collect no revenue directly resulting from use at this site. FWP FAS acquisition, maintenance, and operations funds come from the sale of fishing licenses and matching federal funds.

DNRC and FWP would sign a lease agreement based on 3.5% of the land appraised value. The FWP Fishing Access Site Acquisition account would provide the lease funds incurred until DNRC subdivides and dedicates this land to FWP. This account is funded from the purchase of fishing licenses. DNRC School Trust account would receive this payment from FWP.

The proposed project is estimated to cost $165,000, including consultant fees. The following table identifies the projected sources of funds to construct the proposed project.

Agency Name	Funding Amount	
FWP	$41,250	25%
Fishing Access Site Capital Account Boat Fee In-Lieu of Tax Account		
Sport Fish Restoration Funds Wallop-Breaux	$123,750	75%
Total	$165,000	100%

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**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10f. Projected maintenance costs.
Maintenance at the new Echo Lake FAS is expected to cost approximately $5,000-$10,000 annually to cover cleaning, toilet pumping, litter removal, caretaker activities, gate open/closing, garbage removal service, and seasonal utilities at the host pad. About .23 FTE would be needed to provide an employee 16 hours a week to maintain this and three other fishing access sites. In addition, 0.2 FTE would be needed to provide a warden when needed at this site.

Typically, an FAS caretaker would be assigned to help maintain this site and complete the above tasks; however, funding and staffing for this position is not secure and may have to be redirected from elsewhere.

FAS operations and maintenance funds typically come from angler license funds.

In exchange for trailer pad rent and utilities, the volunteer host would complete a variety of duties, including open/close gates daily, routine litter pick-up, supply latrine with paper, and call enforcement when needed. This would be a new means of management in the FAS program, though it is common in state parks.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X		Yes	11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X		Yes	11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

The lake fingers and islands are picturesque through the trees as viewed from roads around Echo Lake. Structures ranging in size from single room A-frames to several-thousand-square-feet permanent homes can be seen from nearly every aspect of the lake. Timber growth down to the high water mark helps mask much of the development.

The existing use area adjacent to the lake is void of vegetation and consists of shoreline cobble and road gravel. The timber above the proposed parking area is steep, with several trails leading to the older wooden vault latrine. Remnants of campfires, parties, and trees scarred by axes are apparent.

Because much of the land surrounding the lake is DNRC-owned and leased, the School Trust land in Government Lot 9 and the causeway provide the only public access to the lake. The proposed FAS area receives a high volume of use as part of a larger dispersed recreational area. Though it is intended that the new facilities will replace the boat use at the causeway, the causeway will remain open unless unauthorized use becomes problematic.

11a. The scenic vista at the new FAS will be altered to a small degree due to the removal of trees and other vegetation in the immediate roadways, fill for parking, and installation of the boat ramp and latrine. These changes will be visible when vehicles pass above the site on Echo Cabin Loop Road. Boaters and cabin residents could view the altered site from the lake and opposite shoreline.

The site facilities would be low-profile features and constructed with natural color tones to blend with the terrain. The fill material and road gravel would be obtained from local gravel supplier.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

The latrine will have a natural aggregate finish to blend with the surroundings, as well. There will no longer be remnants of unauthorized fires and garbage left on the site. Vehicles will no longer be parked along the shoreline of Government Lot 9.

11c. The quality of boating opportunities would improve over existing conditions at the proposed site after completion of the proposed FAS facilities, while opportunities for picnicking and swimming would be diminished. The proposed FAS would provide a high quality public boat access with an efficient and effective interior loop road, hard surface boat ramp, off-road accessible parking, and a permanent, sealed vault latrine. The boat ramp would allow large boats to launch during low water elevations, a feature currently unavailable.

Opportunities for dispersed recreation activities will slightly decline, since Government Lot 9 Trust Land will be closed to vehicle traffic. Visitors could still access the shoreline by foot to picnic, hike, fish, or swim. Improved roads at the FAS will allow easy access to parking at the site, whereas the shoreline loop road was rough with few places to park.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES **Will the proposed action result in:**	**IMPACT ∗**				**Can Impact Be Mitigated ∗**	**Comment Index**
	Unknown ∗	**None**	**Minor ∗**	**Potentially Significant**		
a. ∗∗Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ∗∗∗∗For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

DNRC Archeologist Patrick Rennie surveyed the site in April and did not find evidence of cultural resources. He submitted his final report to the State Historic Preservation Office for consultation and they concurred with his finding that "there should be no effect to heritage projects with the proposed undertaking." Rennie's report was dated June 2003, and SHPO provided their concurrence June18, 2003. Please see Appendix D.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?			X		Yes	13d.
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						See page 2 #9a, above.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13d. In order to dedicate the land to FWP and provide increased income to the trust fund, DNRC will apply for a future minor subdivision of Government Lot 9 into several leased parcels. The cumulative effects of the FAS day use, combined with additional structures and permanent/seasonal human use on much of Government Lot 9, may have a greater impact on resources and recreational opportunities in the immediate area. Potential impacts can be mitigated in a variety of ways such as sharing residential septic systems, limiting private development to small parcels, residential cluster designs, or retaining a large percentage of Government Lot 9 as open space. DNRC will consider these effects in their planning and complete a separate analysis in cooperation with FWP, biologists, county planners, and the public. DNRC has committed to completing the Real Estate Management Bureau Programmatic EIS by November 2004, before considering the proposed subdivision at Echo Lake.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

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2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

An agreement authorizing the use of the site as proposed shall be entered by DNRC and FWP.

FWP engineering staff will oversee the completion of the project, thus the contractor will be held to the terms of the project, such as limiting soil and vegetation disturbance to the immediate project area, and seeding disturbed areas to aid in reclamation.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has evaluated the impacts of filling the 0.10 acre of wetland and granted a permit requiring no mitigation measures. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will also be consulted regarding the fill of wetlands and if there is a need for mitigation.

The Flathead County Sanitarian must approve the location and installation of the sealed vault septic system (latrine) and the host pad septic system.

A short-term turbidity permit was received from the Department of Environmental Quality. FWP engineering staff has designed this project using Best Management Practices, which will limit changes in surface water runoff or drainage patterns once completed.

Noxious weeds will be monitored by FWP after completion and controlled in accordance with methods outlined in the Region 1 Weed Management Plan and the Flathead County Weed Board.

FWP designed the project to maintain vegetation for wildlife habitat and yet provide a stable ramp and efficient site use. Surrounding areas disturbed by construction would be reclaimed.

Increased access will provide more angler pressure, but angler access is a goal of the fisheries division and is not considered a detriment to the stocked fisheries in Echo Lake.

Traffic patterns and safety increase by improving existing roads, constructing new roads, and erecting directional signage. Safety will improve with stable launching facilities and designated maneuvering and parking areas. Boater safety education opportunities increase with the ability of FWP to actively contact boaters at a designated launching site and post signs.

The FAS host would limit visitors to day-use only, limit vandalism, increase enforcement, and improve relations with neighboring landowners (lease holders).

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Current public access to Echo Lake is poor. This lake provides a well-established warm water fishery and is popular for a variety of water-based recreational activities. The proposed project will partially fill the void for good public access to a lake subject to changing water levels.

The proposed project is intended to supplement poor access at the causeway, and has been designed to accommodate the highest number of parking spaces in the smallest possible area. To provide parking on this tract, the existing 0.10-acre wetland would be impacted. The U.S. Corps of Engineers has been consulted, and because these types of depressions and ground water-influenced wetlands are common in this part of the Flathead Valley, and because this wetland does not provide habitat to a wide variety or high number of species, removing this wetland is considered a minor impact.

Other environmental impacts to the site would be minor, primarily in the form of removing other common forest vegetation to allow for construction. Human impacts can be partially mitigated by an on-site host who opens/closes the entrance gate daily and can alert enforcement personnel about unauthorized activities immediately. It is recognized that some shoreline recreational activities such as picnicking and swimming will be lost at this site due to the limited size and features of the proposed development. Annual boater visitation will likely increase on Echo Lake with construction of a boat ramp accessible during low water levels, but the parking provided will limit the boat traffic on the lake at any given time.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *The Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell)*, Bigfork Eagle,* and *Helena Independent Record;*
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the FWP web page: *http://fwp.state.mt.us*.
- Public notice on the DNRC web page: www.dnrc.state.mt.us

Neighboring landowners, lessees, homeowners association members, and interested parties will be alerted to the availability of this environmental assessment for their review and comment.

A public meeting will be held to discuss the proposed project at 7:00pm on Thursday, December 18, 2003, at the FWP conference room located at 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few impacts, all minor and many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period, if any.

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., January 5, 2004, and can be mailed to the address below:

Echo Lake EA Comments
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email comments to: *mawatkins@state.mt.us*

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO
If an EIS is not required, explain <u>why</u> the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.
Based on the evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Sue Dalbey	Allan Kuser	Steve Lorch
Independent Contractor	Fishing Access Site Coordinator	Special Uses Specialist
Dalbey Resources	FWP	DNRC
926 N. Lamborn St.	PO Box 200701	2250 Highway 93 North
Helena, MT 59601	Helena, MT 59620-0701	Kalispell, MT 59901
406-443-8058	406-444-7885	406-751-2274

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Parks Division
- Wildlife Division
- Fisheries Division
- Enforcement Division
- Design & Construction Bureau
- Legal Division
- Federal Aid Coordinator

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (Kalispell)
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (Kalispell, Missoula)

APPENDICES

A. 23-1-110 MCA Qualification Checklist
B. Concept Drawing (separate .pdf file if viewing an electronic copy of the EA)
C. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
D. Clearance Letter – State Historic Preservation Office

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST
ECHO LAKE LEASE AGREEMENT
AND FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT

Date: November 8, 2003 **Person Reviewing:** Sue Dalbey, consultant
Dalbey Resources

Project Location:

Description of Proposed Work: DNRC to issue and FWP to accept lease agreement and future dedication of approximately 5 acres adjacent to Echo Lake; improve access road to site; construct gravel interior loop road and parking for about 22 vehicles; construct hard-surface boat ramp; install accessible parking, path and latrine; construct host pad with utilities.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check ✓ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

[✓] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments*: Approximately 500' of new road would be constructed to complete a one-way loop route.*

[ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments*: A single stall vault latrine is the only building proposed.*

[✓] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments*: Improving and widening existing roads and construction of the new road and parking areas will require some excavation and about 5,000 cubic yards of fill.*

[✓] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments*: Existing undesignated parking accommodates several vehicles along the roadside; new parking will provide designated space for 22 vehicles.*

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double-wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments*: Proposed ramp is single-width.*

[✓] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments*: The new boat ramp will extend 45' past low water mark of Echo Lake.*

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments*: DNRC Archeologist surveyed the site in April 2003 and found no cultural artifacts on the proposed parcel. SHPO concurred with the archeologist's report that heritage properties should not be affected by the proposed undertaking.*

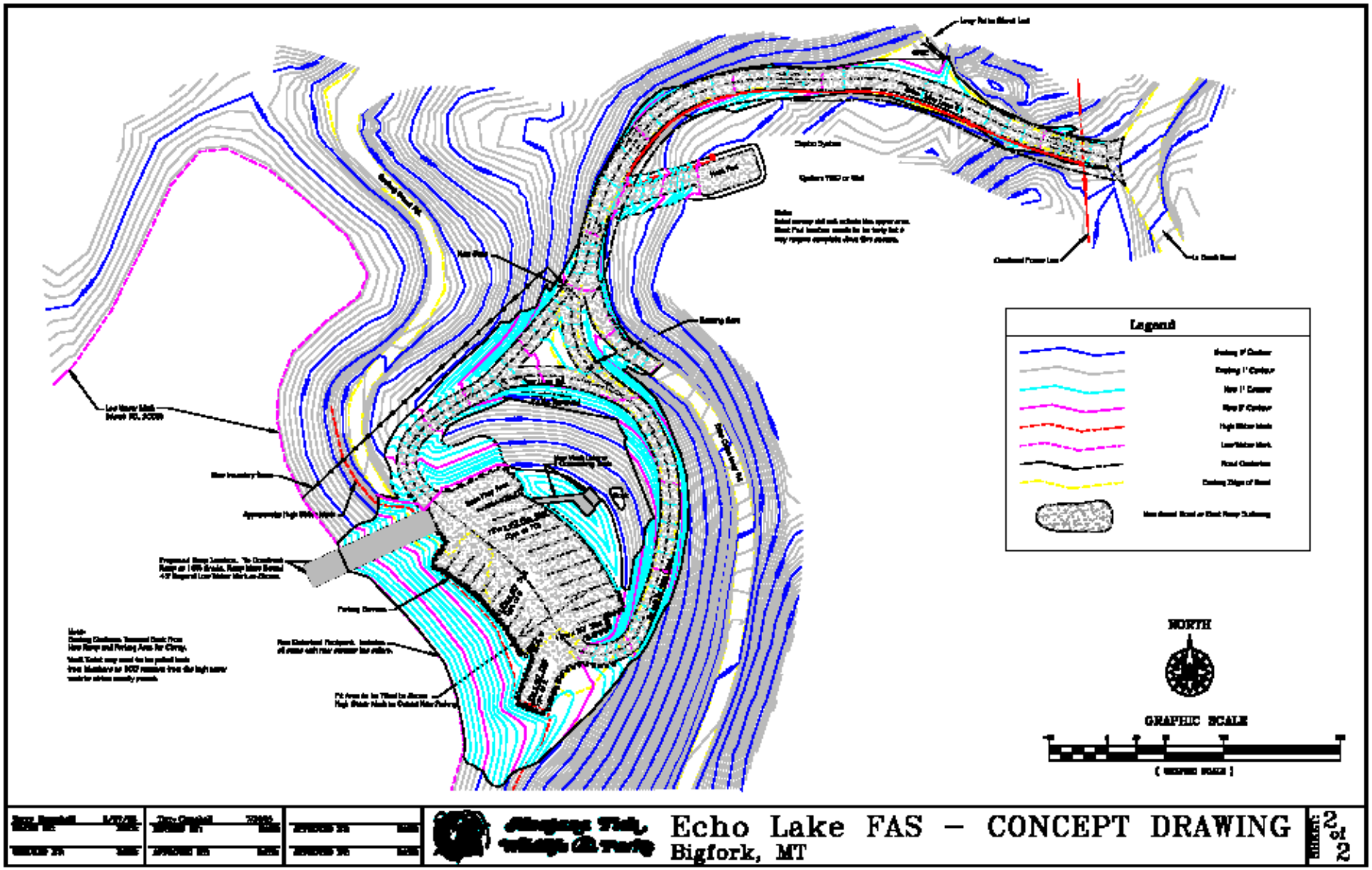
[✓] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments*: Power lines will be needed to the host pad; these may be buried if necessary.*

[ ] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments*: None*

[✓] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments*: The area is currently available for general dispersed recreation and will continue as a recreational site, but with designated facilities. The existing roads proposed for improvement are currently open to public use, though poorly signed and not maintained. Boaters launch small craft here; this project will provide hard surface, formal boat launching facilities.*

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the checklist above. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance; see Regional State Parks office.

APPENDIX B
SITE CONCEPT DRAWING
ECHO LAKE LEASE AGREEMENT
AND FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT



APPENDIX C
TOURISM REPORT – DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
ECHO LAKE LEASE AGREEMENT
AND FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by 23-1-110 MCA and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Victor Bjornberg, Tourism Development Coordinator
Travel Montana-Department of Commerce
PO Box 200533
301 South Park
Helena, MT 59620-0533

Project Name: Echo Lake Fishing Access Site Lease Acquisition and Development

Project Description: Acquire 5-acre lease from Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation on Echo Lake; improve access road to site; construct gravel interior loop road and parking for about 22 vehicles; construct concrete and cable mat boat ramp; install accessible parking and latrine; construct host pad with utilities and boundary fence.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?

   (circle one) NO (YES) If YES, briefly describe:

   Improvements at the Echo Lake FAS would provide a higher quality experience and access to the visitor recreation opportunities found at this site.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

   (circle one) NO (YES) If YES, briefly describe:

   Both the quality and quantity of opportunities and the setting would be improved.

Signature Victor B Jamberg Date 6-5-03

2/93
revised 5/00 sed

APPENDIX D
CLEARANCE LETTER – STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
ECHO LAKE LEASE AGREEMENT
AND FISHING ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION 20030911014

DIVISION OF TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT
JUDY H. MARTZ, GOVERNOR
1625 ELEVENTH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE (406) 444-2074
TELEFAX NUMBER (406) 444-2684
PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

June 6, 2003

JOSEF
DNRC-TRUST LAND
Proposed Echo Lake Fishing Access

JUN 0 [illegible]

BY:
BY:

CONCUR
NO PROPERTIES ON OR ELIGIBLE FOR NRHP APPEAR LIKELY TO EXIST WITHIN PROJECT IMPACT AREA
MONTANA SHPO
DATE 6 June 03 SIGNED

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Attn: Dr. Mark Baumler
P.O. Box 201202
Helena, MT 59620-1202

RE: Cultural Resources Inventory of the Proposed Echo Lake Fishing Access Site: Flathead County, Montana. Report prepared by Patrick Rennie (DNRC Archaeologist, Helena) for the DNRC, Helena and the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena. Report dated 6-2003.

Dear Mark:

Enclosed for your review and files please find a copy of the above referenced report. That report details the results of a cultural resources inventory within and adjacent to the areas of expected disturbance, on state land, of a proposed Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (DFWP) fishing access site in Flathead County.

The DNRC and DFWP are seeking concurrence of the SHPO that there should be **No Effect** to heritage properties with the proposed undertaking.

Thank you in advance for your time, and if you have any questions or concerns regarding the above referenced report or project please let me know.

Sincerely,

Patrick

Patrick J. Rennie
DNRC Archaeologist

encl.